

Just ‘ruff-ing’ it at resort catering to dog owners

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE OCTOBER 5, 2012 12:01 PM



Birgit Schulze and Casiopee, one of her 15 Bernese mountain dogs, greet guests at Domaine Summum.

Photograph by: Courtesy Shell Spillenaar, The Gazette

The news burst out as fast as a greyhound leaving the starting gate. Tails were wagging. Everyone was simply drooling.

Domaine Summum, a lovely lakeside resort, has delish new recipes, package deals and spa treatments. At times like this, I make a lot of friends. And Fanny Turley-Griffiths showed up at my door first, her floppy ears twitching and her nose cold and wet with excitement. Fanny, my friend’s golden retriever, is my chief canine consultant on pet-friendly accommodations and she literally begged for a chance to join me at Domaine Summum as guest columnist. She gave it the hard sell: the beseeching almond eyes, the cute roll-over and finally the “please-take-me-too” wave of her paw. She had me at the first bark.

Summum is a picturesque estate hidden in the woods just south of Mont Tremblant. Owned by dog-lover Birgit Schulze, Summum embraces a private lake, heavy woods cut with lovely trails plus a dog boarding kennel named the Wouf B&B Spaw. There is lodging in five cottages and suites for about 36 people plus their beloved canine pals. It’s also home to Schulze’s business of breeding Bernese mountain dogs. She and her associate Shell Spillenaar invited Fanny and me to tour Summum for an update since my last visit. Summum is a major destination for dogs, dedicated to their well-being, fostering affectionate owner relationships and making their holidays a howlin’ good time. Summum offers Day Camp dog-sitting, Bed & Biscuits overnight boarding and activities like Bark and Splash

aqua-fitness and Tails 'n' Trails snowshoeing and hiking. For people, it has the advantage of being a truly rural place that is a five-minute drive from the shops and bars of St-Jovite and 15 minutes from the Mont Tremblant ski area.

The cottages and suites are warm, attractive country accommodations, with lake views, knotty pine walls, hand-hewn furniture, fireplaces, full kitchens and extras like satellite television, BBQ and firepits for nighttime gatherings under the stars. They are all dog-friendly and most have outdoor pens. The lakefront two-bedroom Cottages sleep up to six people. The Chalets-en-Suites are large, open-concept rooms that work well for four, using a bed and a futon. The Grande Cabine, heated by a wood stove, can lodge up to 16 in five bedrooms with a lot of sofa-beds. You can rent only the accommodations or have a little fun with new packages such as the Ensuite and the Fetch-Bark-and-Roll, which puts together lodging, dog activities, treats and toys. The deluxe Mi Amore deal features wine and canapés for the humans, a plush four-poster bed for canines and Doggie Day Camp.

But Fanny wasn't interested in vacation planning. She couldn't wait to get out into that beautiful Laurentian landscape. Normally, she is a bit of a princess who doesn't really like "ruff-ing it," but when she saw the lake, she plunged right in. Summum wants to create an atmosphere of fun, freedom and uncommon experiences of togetherness for owners and their pets, so weather permitting, owners jump in too.

Now soaked and bedraggled, Fanny headed over to Wouf B&B and Spaw to check out the beauty salon. Frankly, Fanny usually is a swanky bitch, all silky and blond with perfect nails. But after swimming, her hair was a mess and she needed a manicure. So the stylist showed us the Spaw menu and we considered Bubbles & Bath, the Mutt Manicure and the Paw-dicure.

Food makes or breaks a vacation getaway and Summum offers an unusual alternative if guests don't want to cook their own dinner. Christina Strache of À Votre Service Catering steps in as a private chef, creating unusual meals in which both dogs and their owners can eat the same food. You can get a preview of this canine cookery on Summum's new YouTube video, Bone Appetit, created by Spillenaar, a photographer and cineaste. Using mutually agreeable ingredients and adjusting for dog sensitivity, Chef Strache cooks up spaghetti and meatballs, meat loaf, pizza, smoothies, turkey wraps and cottage-cheese breakfasts with certain fruits.

Domaine Summum has one excellent concierge service that I adore. For guests who arrive sans pooch, Birgit can loan out Saska or Balthazar, big, furry, adoring companions, for a walk in the woods or an afternoon cuddle. That's five-paw service, no?

No doubt you'll fall in love and want to perpetuate this enviable dog's life. It's done. Talia recently birthed 10 puppies, which sell for \$1,550 apiece. And, if you would like to build your own doghouse, Domaine Summum also sells lots of land that start at \$48,000 for 4,000 square metres.

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